PARADOXALITY AS A METHOD
OF UNDERSTANDING THE DIVINE MEANINGS
(based on the text of an-Niffary "Kitab al-Mawaqif")

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The paper deals with the paradoxes in the texts of the medieval Sufi Muhammad 'Abd al-Jabbar an-Niffary (X).

Key words: Niffary, Sufism, translation, paradox.

> "And I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and
> vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy".
> "All right," said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly,
> beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin,
> which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.
> "Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin," thought Alice;
> "but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!"
>
> *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll*

As we know the word 'paradox' has various meanings. The popular one is a meaning of logical contradiction, in other words an assertion, the first part of which refutes or denies the other. Etymologically the word 'paradox' goes back to the Ancient Greek word παράδοξος, which consists of two parts: παρά — 'in spite of', 'against', and δόξα — 'opinion', 'generally accepted statement'. In this case the word 'paradox' can be interpreted as 'something that is contradictory to the common opinion, to a generally accepted statement, or 'opinion contradictory to the common sense'. There are two main types of paradoxes in philosophy: logical paradoxes and semantic paradoxes. The brief investigation of different philosophical encyclopedias and dictionaries has shown quite expectable results, though this notion is not popular among philosophers: some philosophical dictionaries just ignore it, others can make references to other dictionary articles. As we see it, for example, in the American philosophical encyclopedias, where the notion 'paradox' is explained in two articles 'Logical paradoxes' and 'Paradoxes of Zeno". In the first article the author (Vann McGee) defines a paradox as a demonstration which results in absurdity, and which is made through the strike deductive method based on the true premises. Practically all philosophical definitions (which just repeat each other) draw attention to the connection between 'paradox' and 'contradiction', "which occurs in a theory, when one keeps to logical correctness of thinking". As an exception we can take the French philosophical dictionary «Dictionnaire de philosophie» (Christian Godin, France, 2004), which contains the most complete list of definitions of 'paradox'.

Among these definitions a definition of 'paradox' as 'every unexpected expression' has a great importance for this article. The other important instrument of our analysis of the texts of Niffary is Goedel's incompleteness theorem (paradox of self-reference), which helped us to understand the common principle of Niffary's worldview.

The first step of our investigation is classification of all possible statements, which could be defined from the logical, semantic or stylistic points of view as paradoxical, in other words, which are unexpected from the language point, though from the meaning point they are not.

Thus, all types of Niffary paradoxes could be represented as follows:

Logical paradoxes

An example of logical paradox in the text of Niffary could be the following one: "I am the Near and the Far, with a nearness which is farness, and a farness which is nearness" (mawqif 2, "Kitab al-Mawaqif", transl. Arberry A.). As we can see here, God in this sentence is simultaneously defined with two contradictory characteristics 'near' and 'far'. In the same time the notion of 'nearness' is defined through its equation with the notion of 'farness' and vice versa.

Semantic paradoxes

Examples of semantic paradox in Niffary's texts are: "I am Manifest, Whose manifestation does not reveal Him: and I am the Inwardly, to the knowledge of Whom the inward faculties do not attain" (mawqif 3, "Kitab al-Mawaqif", transl. Arberry A.). Or, "I revealed Myself unto thee, and thou knewest Me not: that is farness. Thy heart saw Me, and saw Me not: that is farness" (mawqif 2, "Kitab al-Mawaqif", transl. Arberry A.). One can see here that this sentence reproduces the same structure that is in of the famous classical "Liar' paradox ('a liar states that he is lying'). In this case God who is the only source of the whole creation, is said that He is much more than one can see or than His creation, as He makes Himself evident. From the Divine point of view there is no contradiction or paradox, but as for logic one can see a contradiction. The same is true with the second part of the sentence.

Stylistic paradoxes

Niffary uses this type of paradoxes very frequently. We can assume that construction of his texts represents a stylistic paradox. The best example of stylistic paradox in the text of Niffary could be the following one: "The lights rise from the light of my manifestation, and sink into the light of my manifestation: the darkness rise from the failure to seek Me, and depart into the failure to seek Me" (mawqif 2, "Kitab al-Mawaqif", transl. Arberry A.). There are various examples of such a type of the paradox. It is very important that Niffary applies here the effect of unexpectedness by using a language expression, which doesn't have at all any connection with the previous one. This method could be compared with koans in Dzen-Buddhizm or with the sentence 'the sky is blue because you are sad'.

Our analysis of Niffary paradoxes showed that his worldview on the whole is based on the idea of undescribability and unknowableness of God: in the hierarchy 'God-soul' God is the defining substance, or the element which leads the human being just as a hand leads a pen. To understand it more deeply, to realize the mystic worldview of Niffary one can use the abovementioned theorem of Goedel (paradox of self-reference): Nif-

fary has to talk about God in contradictionary manner because it is God who speaks through his mouth, And it means that it is God, who speaks about Himself. As we know the theorem of self-reference can not be demonstrated, because otherwise we fall in contradiction. The same we can see in Niffary's text, which is based on the same ground: God can not be described or defined in non-contradictory way, because paradoxality is the way to understand Him. We can interpret Goedel's theorem in the following way: 'God is a source of absolute Truth and fullness, beyond which there is nothing. God can not be represented in a non-contradictory way, otherwise there occurs a semantic contradiction with the thesis about His Divine essence. That demands another more perfect and absolute essence. But God can not as well be represented in a contradictory way, because it leads to logical contradiction. The only way to talk about God is to use stylistic paradoxes, which are based on the effect of unexpectedness. This fact can only explain a great number of stylistic paradoxes in the texts of Niffary.

NOTE

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(2) [2; 258].
(3) [3; 514—524].
(4) [4; 461].
(5) [5; 931—936].
(6) Ibid.

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ПАРАДОКСАЛЬНОСТЬ КАК СПОСОБ ПОСТИЖЕНИЯ БОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ СМЫСЛОВ В ТЕКСТЕ АН-НИФФАРИ

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